



The Ragged Irregular

91st Bombardment Group (H) Newsletter

Vol. 6 No. 2

January, 1973

My! How Bassingbourn Has Changed!

By Flt. Lt. E.M.C. Rowe, RAF

Editor's Note: Flt. Lt. Rowe is working on a complete history of the 91st during WWII. In the course of gathering information about the group he has made three recent visits to Bassingbourn and vicinity, and passes along these interesting photographs and comments.

Any 91st-er visiting Bassingbourn now for the first time since the war would be in for a few surprises. The first would be at the main gate, which is now guarded by the M3 General Grant tank used by General Montgomery as a Command Tank during the Battle of Alamein, Britain's first major victory of the war. It is interesting to see that an American tank used by the British Eighth Army is now at a British base used by the American Eighth Air Force!

Passing the tank and the British Army sentries, the next obvious change would be seen at the Headquarters building, from which now flies the flag of the Queen's Division, and in front of the building are the flags of the Queen's Regiment, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Royal Anglian Regiment. Also in evidence are an anti-tank gun and a field gun. These all indicate that the station has undergone a lot of changes since the 91st days, and is now a recruit

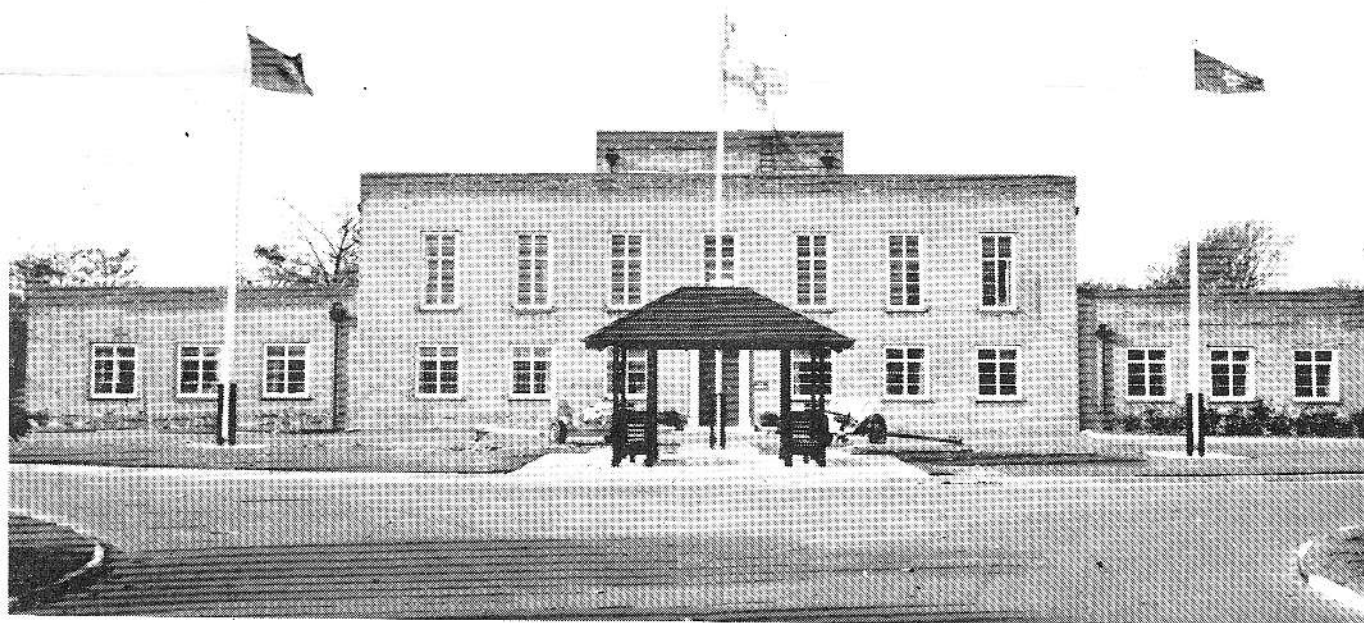
training centre for the army.

One room which would probably seem familiar is the Officers Mess bar, which has been left much as it was when the army took over. Above the bar the crests of units which have been at Bassingbourn in the past remain. Included are those of the four 91st squadrons, though there is no group crest. In addition to the 91st badges there are those of the many R.A.F. units which have used the base, the post-war U.S.A.F. squadrons based there, that of a Royal Netherlands Air Force unit and the recent additions of the Queen's Division Regiments plus the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada and the Gibraltar Regiment.

A walk up to the airfield would bring the greatest indication of change. Half of each runway has been removed, and a number of structures built to aid in the training of recruits. The wartime control tower still stands, but toward the end of the time that the base was used as an airfield a completely new and modern tower was built some distance from it. Deserted hardstandings and hangars devoid of aircraft complete the picture.

Walk around the perimeter track and more alterations are evident. The old 322nd squadron dispersal area is now agricultural land once more, except for three old dispersal pans near to the farm owned by

(continued on page 2)



Bassingbourn Headquarters building, now resplendent with the flags of the Queen's Division, the

Queen's Regiment, the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Royal Anglian Regiment.



Mrs. Howes. These are used as storage areas for manure, hay, and beet respectively. The avenue used by the 401st squadron is now almost overgrown and used to raise game birds by the farmer who rents it from Mrs. Yeoman.

Not that the 91st is forgotten in the area. I had a long talk with Mrs. Howes and her son, both of whom remember the 322nd squadron with affection. John Howes, who was a boy at the time, still remembers the time LG-W caught fire while fully fueled and bombed up as a reserve ship for a mission and the hurried departure of the family from their farm until Mr. Howes senior managed to talk his way back through the road blocks so that he might remove the milking machines from the cows. Signs of the 91st remain around the farm in the shape of old packing cases still used as store cupboards for farm tools, and now and then the odd round of .50 calibre ammunition is turned up. I was allowed the loan of some pictures owned by Mrs. Howes which show the nose of a 322nd B-17G in silver finish, with the name Mary Lou beneath the starboard cheek gun position and with the chin turret named for Ann. Any additional identification of the plane would be appreciated.

Mrs. Yeoman, now 82 years of age and still driving herself around the area when she is not on her bike, remembers the men of the 401st who were brought home for dinner by her husband, and their love of a roast duck or chicken! The trees of the avenue must have been sound absorbent as well as good camouflage, as Mrs. Yeoman has no recollection of being disturbed by B-17 engine noises.

There are changes in Bassingbourn village. Many of the cottages have been pulled down and new housing projects built. The Red Lion pub is no more, but the Hoops still goes strong. Living in the village is Harry "Skipper" Kleine, who worked in the Combat Mess, and is the only 91st-er to marry a Bassingbourn girl and return to live in the village. Harry told me quite a few stories of the 91st, and was able to give me my first knowledge of the Burma Road. Does that bring back any memories?

In Royston I met Mr. Sizer, who sold newspapers to the 91st throughout their stay at Bassingbourn. He recalls that when the first missions were flown by the

91st he was not allowed to leave the base until all aircraft had returned. Since this entitled him to a meal and cigarette ration he was not unduly indisposed by this arrangement. Also in Royston lives Mrs. Ashton, who worked in the office of the Clerk of Works at Bassingbourn. For some time Mrs. Ashton was the only woman working on the base, and remembers that a number of radio men used to visit her husband, who was a civilian radio engineer, and they would build radio sets or repair them as an off-duty relaxation. One friend with whom Mrs. Ashton has lost touch but would like to contact again is T/Sgt. Francis (Fran) Davis, 32335762.

A married couple who ran the Angel pub in Royston, Ted and Doris Foster, now live in Cambridge, having retired. The Angel is no more, having been demolished some time ago, but Ted and Doris still have fond memories of the 91st. They would like to hear from Joe Kuzak if anyone knows his whereabouts.

I spent a very entertaining evening with Ted and Doris, going through their souvenirs of the 91st, which include several cigars given to Ted by various 91st-ers, a copy of the V-E day issue of 'Yank' signed by many of their customers, a T.S. card, and many photographs. Among those which they loaned to me is a crew photo of Sherrie's Cherries; any information on this plane would be appreciated. Another shows the nose of 'The Careful Virgin,' with a group munching away at the doughnuts being served by an unidentified lady. Then there is one of someone remembered as 'Chuck' leaning from the co-pilots window of The Careful Virgin, and believed to be the bombardier.

Editor's postscript: Any 91st-er who can help Flt. Lt. Rowe with information, recollections, etc., can reach him at this address:

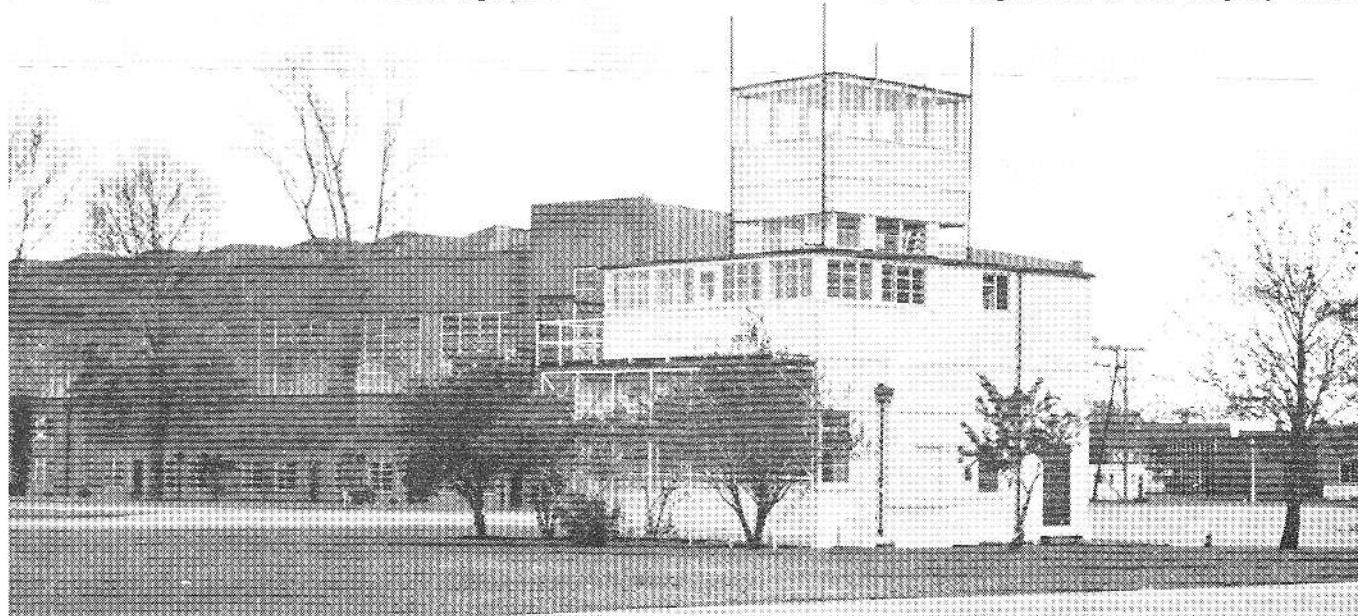
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The Officers Mess Bar. Now used by the British Army, the crests of the units who have used the base in the past remain.



Badges of the 324th and 401st squadrons shown here in a close-up of a portion of the display wall.



Bassingbourn control tower, deserted now but for a modelling club, but it is hoped that at least a part of the building can be converted into a museum of exhibits relating to the 91st Bomb Group.

Down In Germany- Eye Witness Report

When an American B-17 crash landed in Germany after a bombing raid, how did the German civilian populace react? How did they feel? What did they do? An eyewitness account by a German who not only saw the 91st plane Hell's Belle, LLG 42-3060, come down but took pictures at the scene, gives us the impression that the reaction was mostly one of curiosity, and to some degree sympathy, at least in 1943. The story comes to The Ragged Irregular from a German architect, Johann Richter, who saw the plane crash near his small village of Drove, near Duren and Aachen.

His finding the 91st Memorial Association is an interesting story in itself. Woodrow B. Hood II, of Long Beach, Cal., the son of a career Air Force father, in turn joined the Air Force himself as soon as he was old enough in 1966. During his service he married a German girl, Richter's daughter. In looking through his father-in-law's photo album (Richter has been an avid photographer since youth) he found pictures of the downed American plane. Study indicated that the plane might be a 91st aircraft and he contacted the R/I, which was able to positively identify it as one belonging to the 401st squadron, with Edward E. Pinkowski as the crew chief, Matt Pettera as assistant crew chief, assigned to Lt. Gwinn as pilot, and lost after six missions.

The date of the event is recalled by Richter as being in December of '43 or '44, but after such a long time he is not sure. Our records do not give any hint, but since Hell's Belle is a B-17F in olive drab '43 seems most probable. If any members can clear up this point or has additional information please pass the information on to the editor.

Here is Richter's story:

I first saw the flight of Fortresses flying at a very high altitude over my little village of Drove about 10 a.m., going in a southeasterly direction. In about two hours the planes came back, this time flying much lower. One of them was flying very low, with both engines on the left stopped and the propellers not rotating.

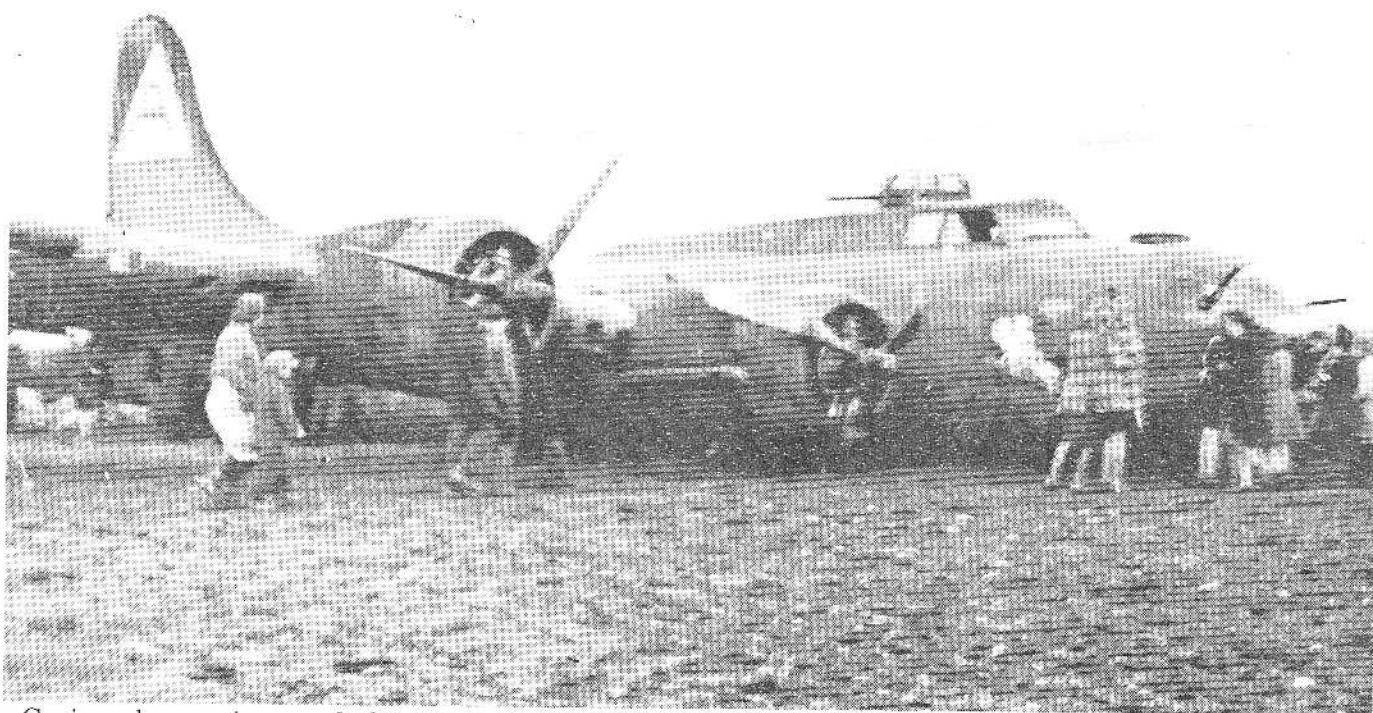
A few miles further on the plane made a crash landing in a farm field. "It was a very skillful landing, uphill on a small hill, just beside a little valley. As the plane was making its long landing descent the plane passed within 300 yards of a German troop concentration training in nearby woods. The landing gear was knocked off when they struck a huge pile of sugar beets," Richter recalls, "but the belly landing was smooth, without much damage to the craft."

Several crew members—four or five—immediately jumped out and headed for a nearby forest; the others stayed around the plane for awhile.

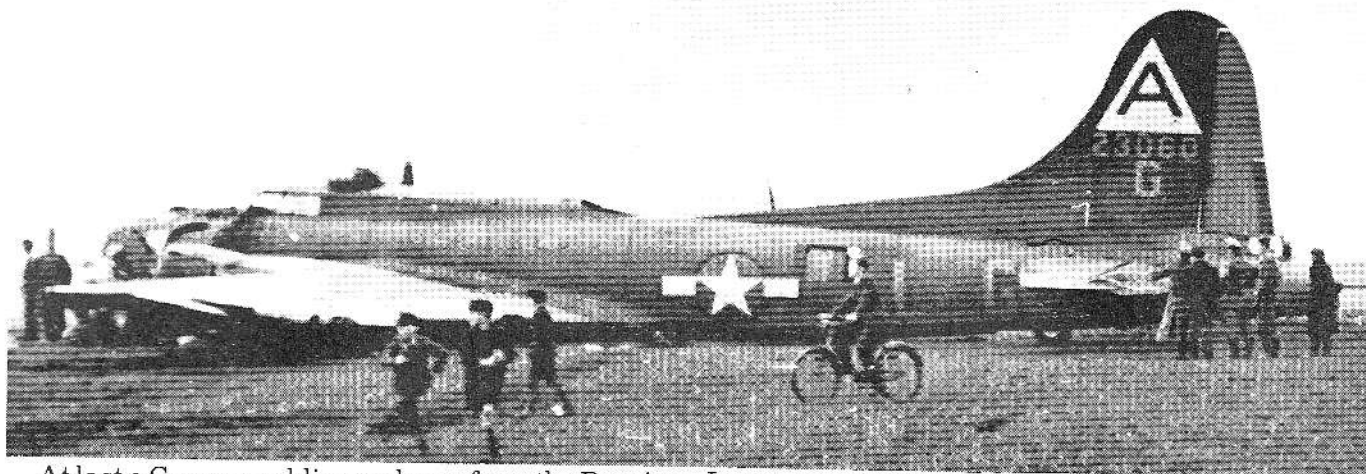
Richter was the first person on the scene, then other curious persons came running to see the downed plane. Though none of the crowd could speak English they concluded that the crew thought they were down in Belgium. The Belgium border is close to the area of the crash. Two Polish prisoners working in a nearby field became very excited, believing that the Americans had arrived to liberate them.

The pilot tried to keep the civilians away from the plane as he sought to set it afire with shots from his flare pistol into the engines, but the flares did not ignite the Fortress.

(continued on page 5)



Curious housewives and children examine Hell's Belle as she rests in the German field near Boich.



At last a German soldier, on leave from the Russian front, arrived at the scene and put the pilot and several crew members under arrest. They were taken to the mayor's house in nearby Boich. The mayor, Karl Nolden, was very much an anti-nazi, and he and his wife fed the captured crewmen and tried to assure them that they would be well treated. Richter's uncle, the village priest and the only English-speaking resident of Boiche, also assured them that there were no SS men in the area and that they had nothing to fear.

Later, two civilian police came by and took the 91st-ers away.

It was reported that some crew members were later captured in nearby Mausauel forest.

Within four days the German army had dismantled Hell's Belle and taken the ship away.

Richter and his son-in-law Hood would like very much to contact any survivors of the crash. If any 91st-ers can give any information about the crew or the mission please drop a line to the editor of the R/I.



Here is the crew of Hell's Belle posed before the plane at Basingbourn. By a curious coincidence the crew shot was among a group of general pictures sent in recently by Matt Pettera, Rt. 1, Wauzeka, Wisc. We

have not been able to identify the crew and are not sure that this is the group that crashed in Germany, though it most probably is. If anyone can help with the identification please contact the editor.

Ocean City Rally Round Is Big Hit

Another great Eastern area Rally Round was held at Ocean City, N.J., under the expert guidance of genial Jack Fearheller. More than 50 members and guests enjoyed the event October 14-15.

Flt. Leader John L. Perrone, of West Haven, Conn., who had himself hosted an outstanding Rally Round at West Haven some months ago, took advantage of the affair to become the latest Life Member of the Memorial Association. He was awarded not only his Gold Card life membership card but a special "Rigid Digit Glass" to commemorate his \$100 donation to the group.

Del Kaech of Arnold, Mo., was awarded an English silver mug for having travelled the greatest distance to attend. The mug was the special gift of host Jack Fearheller. Del was attending with his former pilot, Tony Arcara. Both were from the 324th squadron, and were shot down on the famous 17 August '43 raid to Schweinfurt and became prisoners of war for the duration.

The Association president, Gen. Wray, was awarded Ocean City's highest honor by being ap-

pointed "Commodore" by Mayor B. Thomas Waldman. Gen. Wray joins a number of widely-known notables who have been so honored.

Attending were: Maj. Gen. and Mrs. Stanley T. Wray; Mr. and Mrs. Paul Chryst; Joseph a Camelleri; Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Giambrone; Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Gerstemeier; Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Arcaro; Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Bankovsky.

Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Bellettiere; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bishop; Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Bonnel; Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Bradley; Joseph C. Cullen; Mr. and Mrs. Robert DeGeorge; Mr. and Mrs. Jack Fearheller and family; Mr. and Mrs. Carter J. Green; Mr. and Mrs. Carl Gundersen and son; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Holman; Mr. and Mrs. Harry E. Hovermill; Mr. and Mrs. Del Keach,

Ernest J. Kiss; Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Kryjak; Mr. and Mrs. Leo L. Lyons; Mr. and Mrs. George Odenwaller; Mr. and Mrs. John Perrone; Mr. and Mrs. Alton E. Renninger; Nicholas Terefenko; R. W. Jackson.



Flight Leader John L. Perrone of West Haven, Conn., joined the select group of Life Members with a \$100 donation at the Ocean City Rally Round. Here

John matches his Rigid Digit glass with General Wray's tie tack.



Eastern Division Chairman Paul Chryst presents an English silver mug (the gift of host John Fearheller) to Dal Kaech, Arnold, Mo., for having travelled the greatest distance to attend the rally round. Del came with his former pilot, Tony Arcara.



Inspection day photo of Bay 6, 401st squadron. Back row, Vernon Jorgensen, Glen Boyce, Al Peters, Charles Karas, Robert Martin, Louis Rodgers. Kneeling, Alex Philen, Harold Morin, George Popowitz, Matt Pettera. Second row, George Elliott, Gilbert Cloyd, Charles Zentz, Woodrow Tressler, Walter M. Ward, Nowel Rodewald, Thomas Sharp.

California Rally Round Set For Feb. 17

A California State Rally Round for 91st-ers in all the Western area has been slated for Saturday, February 17, at the Jolly Roger Inn, 640 West Katella, Anaheim. A big turn-out of area members is expected, according to Flt. Leader Doug Gibson.

Maj. Gen. Wray will head up the mission.

The Briefing Room, No. 140-A will open at 1400 for refueling and meeting old friends and crew members.

A no-host cocktail hour is scheduled for 1800 in the main ballroom, followed by dinner at 1900. The tab is \$5.

There will be a TV movie of the 1972 reunion, and a showing of the NEW Memphis Belle film.

Former German fighter pilots will be guests of the group.

Reservations for rooms should be made directly with the Jolly Roger. Be sure to let them know you are with the 91st.

Flt. Leader Doug Gibson can be contacted at 2740 Knoxville Ave., Long Beach, Cal. Phone area code 213-425-6163.

From The Editor's Desk... Paul C. Burnett Box 909, Auburn, Al. 36830

Getting letters from ex-91st-ers is one of the real rewards Memorial Association workers receive for the long hours spent on group affairs. Here's a good example from CMS Robert L. Modell, 113-2 Shawnee Road, Minot AFB, N.D. 58701:

Dear Joe,

You don't know me, in so far as I can remember we've never met—yet I find great satisfaction in being actively associated with my fellow 91st-ers after so many years.

I was a S/Sgt ball gunner in the 323rd squadron from October '43 to March '44, at which time we bought the farm on a raid to Augsburg. We (my co-pilot Lt. Mersereau) made our way to Switzerland where I stayed till February '45, then back to Basingbourn to clear up outstanding personnel matters and so on back to the redistribution center at Atlantic City. I've been on active duty with the Air Force since May of '51 when I was recalled with my reserve outfit.

For the information of the rest of the guys the 91st still flies. The 91st Strategic Missile Wing is located here at Minot and is equipped with the Minuteman III ICBM's. I am in the 5th Bomb Wing, a B-52/ KC-135 Heavy Bombardment out and I'm the maintenance superintendent of the 5th Organizational Maintenance Squadron. Since '51 I've been a "maintenance weevil" in various SAC Bomb wings—the 55th, 72nd, 100th, 305th, etc., accept for a tour in SEA ram-rodming the LAO T-28 fighter-bombers. Through the years I've never forgotten the good—and bad—times I experienced as a 91ster. I've got about five years left before I reach my 30 active years service at which point I'll have to retire. I sincerely hope I'll find a way in that time to make it to a local rally round or an annual get-together.

In the meantime, enclosed is a few bucks to keep the treasury going and to keep the Ragged Irregular coming my way.

Bob Modell

Members who would like copies of the group picture made at the Queen Mary during the Anaheim reunion in July can order them from photographer George Royse. Color prints are \$3.50 plus postage and black and white prints are \$2.50 plus postage. His address is George Royse, 3661 Gondar Ave., Long Beach, Cal. 90808.

We have received the sad news of the passing of three staunch Association members since the last issue of The Ragged Irregular.

Robert "Bob" Stewart died on October 16. Bob was a member of the 401st squadron and was on the first Hamm raid. Later he was barracks chief of the combat crew barracks of the 401st. His wife Elsie lives at 720 Ocean Ave., Box 565, Westport, Wash. 98595.

Aaron S. Youell died of a sudden heart attack October 25 at Twentynine Palms, Cal. Aaron was a 401st tail gunner on Invasion II. He was shot down on his 21st mission and spent 25 months as a P.O.W. His wife Betty lives at 73983 Casita Drive, 29 Palms, Cal. 92277.

Ben D. Dugger, ex 322nd squadron gunner, died November 29 at the V.A. Hospital at Long Beach after a long illness. His wife Helen lives at 1532 1/2 East 1st St. Long Beach, Cal. 90802.

West Coast Sec.-Treas. George Parks still has a few silver and gold wire Group Blazer Patches on hand for \$12, including mailing. These are real knock-outs. George can be contacted at 109 Wilshire Ave., Vallejo, Cal. 94590.

It's Dues Time Again!

1973 dues of \$5 (this includes a copy of a new directory to be printed soon) should be sent to the treasurer as soon as possible. Non-dues payers do not receive The Ragged Irregular nor can they take part in Group activities.

Eastern Division:

Joe Giambrone 303 Brookdale Ave., Glenside, Pa. 19038

Western Division:

George Parks 109 Wilshire Ave., Vallejo, Cal. 94590

DO IT NOW!